

Nutrition Recommendations for COVID-19

**Dining Services
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey**

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Contents

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Preventative Nutrition	3
Immune-Supporting Nutrients	3
Additional Lifestyle Tips	4
Nutrition Considerations During Illness	4
Recommended Foods & Sample Menus	5
Vegetarian Sample Menus	8
Vegan Sample Menus	11
References	14

Preventative Nutrition

The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to the COVID-19 virus.¹ Practicing [social distancing](#) and [proper hand washing](#) can help protect yourself and others from infection.¹ However, you may be asking yourself, can the food I eat play a role in prevention? While diet alone may not be able to prevent infection, focusing on nutrient-rich foods paired with healthy lifestyle behaviors, can help give your body extra protection by supporting a healthy immune system.²

Immune-Supporting Nutrients:

Vitamin A: Vitamin A is an important nutrient involved in immune function and can be found in many fruits and vegetables such as carrots, sweet potatoes, squash, broccoli, spinach, cantaloupe, mango, peppers, and tomatoes.³

Vitamin D: Vitamin D has many roles in the body, including contributing to immune function.⁴ Vitamin D is naturally found in fatty fish (such as salmon, tuna, and mackerel) and in small amounts in some dairy products, egg yolks, and mushrooms.⁴ Vitamin D fortified foods such as cow's milk, plant-based milk alternatives, orange juice, and ready to eat breakfast cereals, provide most of the Vitamin D in American diets.⁴

Zinc: Zinc deficiency has been shown to increase susceptibility to various pathogens.⁵ Incorporating meat, seafood, tofu, nuts, and beans into your diet will ensure adequate intake of this immune-boosting mineral.²

Vitamin C: While Vitamin C will not cure your cold, it may help maintain immunity.^{2,6} Vitamin C-rich foods include citrus fruits (like orange, lemon, and grapefruit), berries, melons, tomatoes, bell peppers, and broccoli.⁶

Probiotics: Probiotics are beneficial bacteria that can promote a healthy gut and immune system.² Probiotics can be found in cultured dairy products like yogurt and fermented products like kimchi.²

Additional Lifestyle Tips:

- Focus on maintaining a well-balanced eating plan. Try incorporating five to seven servings of vegetables and fruits daily to get the immune-supporting vitamins and minerals mentioned above.²
- Find healthy and supportive ways to cope with stress, such as meditation, journaling, and [speaking with a counselor](#).
- Incorporate physical activity. Physical activity can be a great way to help manage stress and support a healthy body.² Try going for a walk or run outside or stay indoors using online exercise and yoga videos.
- Practice good sleep hygiene. Lack of sleep can contribute to a weakened immune system.² Seven to nine hours of sleep is recommended each day for most adults.²

Nutrition Considerations During Illness

When feeling ill, general nutrition recommendations include eating a variety of foods as tolerated and maintaining proper hydration. Certain foods may be easier to tolerate when experiencing flu-like symptoms such as fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Fever especially can be a risk factor for dehydration and therefore, individuals experiencing fever should focus on adequate hydration by drinking plenty of fluids.⁷ Healthy individuals need 8 to 10 cups of fluid each day.⁷ Sick individuals may need to drink more to replace fluids lost to fever.⁷ In addition, staying hydrated with water, seltzer and tea can help thin and loosen the mucus that causes congestion, sore throat, and coughing.⁸

If you have questions regarding the information provided on this page, please feel free to contact the Dining Services Nutrition Specialists:

Dr. Peggy Policastro, RDN
peggyp@dining.rutgers.edu

Marina Vineis, MS, RDN
mvineis@dining.rutgers.edu

Recommended Foods & Sample Menus

The sample 3-day menus below contain foods that may be easier to tolerate when experiencing flu-like symptoms. These menus can be used as a guide for daily meal and snack ideas to meet the general nutritional needs of individuals experiencing illness (for example, flu-like symptoms or COVID-19 symptoms). In addition to food recommendations, these menus also incorporate beverage options to help increase fluid intake. Below you will find regular, vegetarian, and vegan menu options that range from 1600-1800 calories per day.

Sample Menu #1

Breakfast

- 1 individual pack puffed rice cereal (like rice krispies or rice chex)
- 1 cup milk or milk alternative
- 1 ripe banana

Morning Snack

- 2 graham cracker packets
- 1 cup hot water and decaffeinated tea bag or 1 bottle water

Lunch

- 2 cups chicken and rice soup (or other broth-based chicken soup)
- 1/2 cup cooked carrots
- 1 slice of bread
- 1 packet jelly
- 1 cup applesauce
- 1 bottle water

Afternoon Snack

- 1-2 packets of saltine crackers
- 1 bottle/cup 100% fruit juice

Evening Meal

- 4 to 6 oz baked, breaded fish or chicken, with salt and a squeeze of lemon
- 1 packet butter or margarine
- 1/2 baked potato
- 1/2 cup green beans, cooked well
- 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Evening Snack

- 1 5oz cup Greek yogurt, 1 honey packet
- 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Sample Menu #2

Breakfast

2 eggs, scrambled
1 slice toast
1 packet butter or margarine
1 salt packet
1 cup milk or milk alternative

Morning Snack

2 graham cracker packets
1 cup hot water and decaffeinated tea bag or 1 bottle water

Lunch

Turkey and cheese sandwich
Iceberg lettuce and tomato slices
1 cup mandarin orange slices
1 bottle water

Afternoon Snack

1 bag plain pretzels
1 bottle/cup 100% fruit juice

Evening Meal

Stir fry: 4-6oz chicken (lightly seasoned)
1 cup rice
½ cup shredded carrots and peas
Salt, pepper, soy sauce packets, on the side
1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Evening Snack

1 cup Italian ice
1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Sample Menu #3

Breakfast

- 1 cup hot cereal (like cream of wheat or oatmeal)
- 1 ripe banana
- 1 cup hot water and decaffeinated tea bag

Morning Snack

- 2 graham cracker packets
- 1 bottle water

Lunch

- 1 peanut butter and jelly sandwich
- 1 cup applesauce
- 1 cup milk or milk alternative

Afternoon Snack

- 1-2 packets of saltine crackers
- 1 bottle/cup 100% fruit juice

Evening Meal

- 1 cup cooked pasta
- 4-6oz grilled chicken breast (lightly seasoned)
- 1/2 cup green beans, cooked well
- 1 small dinner roll
- 1 packet butter or margarine
- 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Evening Snack

- 1 cup of popcorn
- 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Vegetarian (Lacto-Ovo) Sample Menu #1

Breakfast

- 1 individual pack puffed rice cereal (like rice krispies or rice chex)
- 1 cup milk or milk alternative
- 1 ripe banana

Morning Snack

- 2 graham cracker packets
- 1 cup hot water and decaffeinated tea bag or 1 bottle water

Lunch

- 2 cups vegetarian soup (broth-based like lentil or bean/noodle)
- 1/2 cup cooked carrots
- 2-3 packets saltine crackers
- 1 teaspoon butter or margarine
- 1 cup applesauce
- 1 bottle water

Afternoon Snack

- 1 5oz cup Greek yogurt, 1 honey packet
- 1 bottle/cup 100% fruit juice

Evening Meal

- 1 garden vegetable patty
- 1 burger bun
- 1 cup cooked green beans (cooked well)
- 1 packet butter or margarine
- 3 packets ketchup
- 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Evening Snack

- 1 slice bread
- 1 packet butter/margarine and jelly
- 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Vegetarian (Lacto-Ovo) Sample Menu #2

Breakfast

2 eggs, scrambled
1 slice toast
1 packet butter or margarine
1 salt packet
1 cup milk or milk alternative

Morning Snack

1-2 packets saltine crackers
1 cup applesauce

Lunch

5-6oz hummus
1 pita
1 cup cooked carrots (cooked well)
1 banana
1 packet peanut butter
1 bottle water

Afternoon Snack

1 5oz cup Greek yogurt, 1 honey packet
1 bottle/cup 100% fruit juice

Evening Meal

Stir fry made with: 4-6oz tofu or beans (lightly seasoned)
1 cup rice
½ cup shredded carrots and peas
Salt, pepper, soy sauce packets, on the side
1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Evening Snack

1 cup Italian ice
1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Vegetarian (Lacto-Ovo) Sample Menu #3

Breakfast

- 1 cup hot cereal (like cream of wheat or oatmeal)
- 1 ripe banana
- 1 cup hot water and decaffeinated tea bag

Morning Snack

- 2 graham cracker packets
- 1 bottle water

Lunch

- 1 peanut butter and jelly sandwich
- 1 cup applesauce
- 1 cup milk or milk alternative

Afternoon Snack

- 1 5oz cup Greek yogurt, 1 honey packet
- 1 bottle/cup 100% fruit juice

Evening Meal

- 1 cup cooked pasta
- 4-6oz grilled tofu (lightly seasoned)
- 1 cup green beans, cooked well
- 1 small dinner roll
- 1 packet butter or margarine
- 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Evening Snack

- 1 cup popcorn
- 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Vegan Sample Menu #1

Breakfast

- 1 individual pack puffed rice cereal (like rice krispies or rice chex)
- 1 cup alternative milk (like soy milk)
- 1 ripe banana

Morning Snack

- 2 graham cracker packets
- 1 cup hot water and decaffeinated tea bag or 1 bottle water

Lunch

- 2 cups vegan soup (broth-based like lentil or bean/noodle)
- 1/2 cup cooked carrots
- 3 packets saltine crackers
- 1 cup applesauce
- 1 bottle water

Afternoon Snack

- 1 bag plain pretzels
- 1 bottle/cup 100% fruit juice

Evening Meal

- 1 garden vegetable patty
- 1 burger bun
- 1 cup cooked green beans (cooked well)
- 3 packets ketchup
- 1 salt packet
- 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Evening Snack

- 1 slice bread
- 1 packet jelly
- 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Vegan Sample Menu #2

Breakfast

4-5oz scrambled tofu
1 slice toast
1 salt packet
2 ketchup packets
1 cup alternative milk (like soy milk)

Morning Snack

2 graham cracker packets
1 bottle/cup 100% fruit juice

Lunch

5-6oz hummus
1 pita
1 cup cooked carrots (cooked well)
1 banana
1 packet peanut butter
1 bottle water

Afternoon Snack

1-2 packets saltine crackers
1 cup applesauce

Evening Meal

Stir fry: 4-6oz tofu or beans (lightly seasoned)
1 cup rice
½ cup shredded carrots and peas
Salt, pepper, soy sauce packets, on the side
1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Evening Snack

1 cup Italian ice
1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Vegan Sample Menu #3

Breakfast

- 1 cup hot cereal (like cream of wheat or oatmeal)
- 1 ripe banana
- 1 packet salt, vegan butter, jelly
- 1 cup hot water and decaffeinated tea bag

Morning Snack

- 2 graham cracker packets
- 1 bottle water

Lunch

- 1 peanut butter and jelly sandwich
- 1 cup applesauce
- 1 cup alternative milk (like soy milk)

Afternoon Snack

- 1 bag plain pretzels
- 1 bottle/cup 100% fruit juice

Evening Meal

- 1 cup cooked pasta
- 4-6oz grilled tofu (lightly seasoned)
- 1 cup green beans, cooked well
- 1 small dinner roll
- 1 packet vegan butter
- 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Evening Snack

- 1 dairy free ice cream sandwich (Tofutti Cutie)
- 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

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